

## [Tales of the Moccasin Maker of Cordova]

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Cordova

### TALES OF THE MOCCASIN MAKER OF CORDOVA

Manuel Trujillo was busy making a pair of " Teguas " or cow-skin moccasins and had only ceased plying his awl when he gave me a good day. I seated myself in his doorway and we talked first of this and then that as I watched him at his work. He was acknowledged one of the best moccasin makers in the village. I could well believe this as I noticed the efficiency with which he worked and the neatness of the scalloped edges where the sole was stitched to the uppers. The soles made of well-softened cowhide used hairy side out when new, gave the wearer the same effect as walking on a deep napped rug. Deer hunters keep a pair of these moccasins in reserve because they render their foot steps noiseless in the woods. Before factory-made shoes and boots were introduced into this country moccasins were commonly used for every day. Any shoes or boots acquired thru trade with Mexico were very carefully saved for feast days or other great occasions. In those early days a good moccasin maker never lacked for work and food for his household, being paid in produce. Money was almost unknown. Suddenly the tolling of the bell broke in on our conversation. [??] [Ben 6?]

"Must be that Jose Dolores has died," said Manuel, "He has been quite sick, but let's see." Stepping outside he lifted his old eyes to the bell tower. All the patios of the village were full of people after the same information and the bell toller was straining his voice trying to

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make himself heard above the reverberations of the bell. Since everybody was asking the same question he kept repeating "Commend to God the soul of Teodorita Garduno". C. 18  
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"They are tolling for Todorita who died in Taos; may God have mercy on her soul," was Manuel's comment.

"Oh yes, I remember her", I said, "She seemed to be a very good woman. I remember she was the one who always rang the bell for the vesper services during the month of May, and she was so old it must have been a real sacrifice to climb that long ladder every evening of the whole month."

"Yes, she kept that up until her grand-daughter took her to live with her in Taos," answered Manuel. "But I happen to know how she took on that duty. That and other seeming pious acts of hers were just to make us believe she was a good Christian and were done through fear. I happen to know she was a witch and that she was made to beg for forgiveness in public twice, and even for her life. Maybe she really repented before she died. God only knows. But I will tell you. The first time was when Jose de la Luz Chavez' wife swore before the alcalde that Teodorita was trying to bewitch her or her baby and swore that she had proved her a witch. She testified that she had tested Teodorita once when she called at her home. After Teodorita was inside she had secretly placed two needles in the shape of a cross over the doorframe.

"Teodorita tried to leave the house several times, but would get as far as the door and return. She tried this several times and became desperate at her inability to go through that door. Finally Luz' wife taking pity on her removed the needles and showed them to her. 'Now I know you are a witch, and I want you to promise never to harm me or my family,' she told her. But Teodorita rushed out the door and in her anger cursed Luz' wife

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and threatened her baby and herself with unmentionable evils. This was the testimony sworn to before the alcalde. Whereupon the alcalde named two men to accompany Luz to punish Teodorita. They were empowered to whip her if she did not confess and promise to refrain from harming Luz or his family.

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"In those days the alcalde was the law and what he ordered was carried out. One of these men was Salvador Martinez who helped kill that witch in Chimayo. Because of some harm done him by witches when he was younger he had a very great hatred for them and would gladly kill one. And this time he had the authority given him by the alcalde. When they reached Teodorita's house and read the accusation she at first denied everything, but when Salvador approached with a lariat with which to tie her she knew she could expect no mercy. His reputation was too well known to her. Throwing herself on her knees she begged for mercy, confessed herself a witch, and promised to repent and to not harm Luz or his family. She did not get off so easy because she was made to pray the Rosary with bare knees resting on gravel taken from ant hills. That is very painful I know very well. I doubt if she ever did quit even if she did appear to be so saintly. Many times we noticed those balls of fire, bounding down the hillside as if from Truchas. Reaching Teodorita's house they would disappear as if down the chimney. And the owls used to hoot always in the trees near her house. I doubt if she ever reformed. At any rate everybody in the village was afraid of the old woman and would cross themselves on meeting her. Very few people ever ate anything she prepared and she never had any visitors except those which came through the air.

"At another time a group of our brethern were going on a visit to Chimayo. As we were going along singing we noticed a ball of fire rolling along the top of the ridge just to the right of us. Juan Mondragon was with us. You know a Juan can catch a witch no matter in what shape she is. So Juan stepped over in front of this ball of fire and making the sign of

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the cross drew a circle in the air with his finger. That is, more or less around or in the path of the ball of fire. And, look you, there was Teodorita with her little eyes glaring at us in the lights from our lanterns.

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She was very mad and implored Juan to let her go. We would not let him until we had made her pray with us then we made her accompany us, barefoot, to Chimayo and back again to Cordova. Then it was that she promised again to behave and perform good deeds in penance for her years of being a witch.

"I have seen many strange things on those night visits to other Moradas made in company with other of my brethren. When we had a visit to make to Alcalde we did not go by way of the road. But we would cut across through the hills by way of the Sentinela. Twice after leaving here and getting to the Canada Ancha we were joined by departed brethren. Amiguito, the flesh of our bodies would crawl and creep when these ghosts joined us even though we knew they meant us no harm. They were, no doubt, the spirits of those who had neglected some sworn vows while on earth and had been sent back to fulfill them in this way. Before we knew it they would be with us and they would accompany us until we started down towards the first houses in Ranchitos. The lights from our lanterns seemed to shine through them and we could see their ribs and the bones of their arms as they walked along with us. They were all hooded, some were flagellating, and others dragged crosses. How strange to see those "disciplinas" fall on those ghostly, scarred backs and to see those heavy crosses being dragged along without a sound. And when we stopped to pray our brethren from the other world stopped with us, crossing themselves at the proper times, but never making a sound. You may be sure we were very glad when they would leave us and we waited until daylight to make the return trip. These were undoubtedly brethren who had made vows while on earth to make some penance or pilgrimage and

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had neglected to do so while alive and had been sent back to fulfill them before being able to enter heaven. Pobrecitos, may God have given their soul's rest before this."